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Town Office Building
1625 Massachusetts Avenue
Lexington
Middlesex County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1174

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

INTRODUCTION

The Town Office Building of Lexington, Massachusetts is located at 1625 Massachusetts Avenue, in the center of Lexington. A town of 30,000 people, Lexington is part of Middlesex County. The town owns and is the sole occupant of the building, which is used to administer local government.

The Town Office Building was constructed in 1927-1928, and the 1970-1971 addition doubled the size of this structure. Previous municipal buildings, built in 1847 and 1871, contained the town's meeting room as well as administrative offices, and were both known as the Town Hall. Before the mid 19th Century, the town's meetinghouses served a dual purpose, as a gathering place for religious services conducted by the First Congregational Society, and as a meeting place for transacting municipal business. The first meetinghouse was built in 1692, replaced in 1713, and sold for 17 pounds in 1715. The second structure was destroyed by fire and replaced by the third and final meetinghouse in 1794, which also burned down in 1846.

Unlike Lexington's Town Office Building, the 1847 and 1871 municipal buildings served a number of tenants. The former contained a high school; the latter included a library, a bank and meeting rooms for the local Masonic order. Today's municipal building was designed solely for the town offices. While the weekly Board of Selectmen meetings take place in the Town Office Building, many of the other public meetings are held in the Isaac Harris Cary Memorial Building including the Town Meeting sessions. The Cary Memorial was constructed adjacent to the Town Office Building in 1927-1928.

Lexington's Town Office Building was designed and later expanded and remodeled in a manner appropriate for a growing community adopting new methods of government. Lexington's population of 2,270 in 1870 had soared to 7,785 by 1925. The rate of growth had increased significantly by the 1880's, when many business men moved to Lexington and modernized municipal affairs. By 1893 the annual Town Meeting voted to establish a finance committee, and from the turn of the century to America's entry into the First World War local politics was at a fever pitch. Edwin B. Worthen, author of A Calendar History of Lexington, Massachusetts 1620-1946, explains that in the first two decades of this century, "the personal ambitions of a half dozen men served to keep the town in continuous political ferment."

Due to new attitudes about government, the population growth, and most importantly, the condition of the Town Hall, the Town Office Building Committee reported at a 1927 Town Meeting that the 1871 municipal building would only meet the needs of Lexington for a few years. This committee chose an architectural style for the new Town Office Building that would be both reminiscent of the Town's past and functional for a changing town. The exterior of the building was given red bricks and white trimmings, suggestive of the colonial architecture at the time the American Revolution began here. The offices most frequently visited in the 1871 Town Hall were put on the main floor of the 1927-1928 building and given the most counter space. Provisions were made for future expansion of the building as well.

By the 1960's an expansion was necessary because of a high population increase, the inefficiency of existing services, the need to modernize the

heating and wiring, and the need for more office space for the new Town Manager, and desire to put all the town offices in one building. The second Town Office Building Committee adopted the idea of their predecessors of enlarging the structure by adding on in the rear. This committee and the Town Meeting chose to preserve the appearance of the original building by using the same exterior design for the addition. They had the contractor remodel the interior of the old wing based on a two-week study of how busy each department was. And, like the original Town Office Building Committee, the modern committee included plans for future additions. Hence, the design of Lexington's Town Office Building has been fashioned in keeping with her history and the town's ever-changing needs.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection

According to Worthen's Calendar History, the Town Office Building was completed and occupied on June 30, 1928. The Annual Reports of the Town Officers of Lexington, Massachusetts: Year, 1927 describe the action taken on Article 4 of that year's Town Warrant. On January 31, 1927, the Town Meeting unanimously passed the motion (Article 4) of the author of the Calendar History, Edwin B. Worthen: "to appoint a committee of 11 to consider the advisability of building a new Town Office Building ...".* The same volume of the Annual Reports reveals that on March 28, 1927, the Town Meeting approved the recommendation of the Town Office Building Committee to make specifications for a new municipal building. Finally, on September 22, 1927 the Town Meeting gave this committee "full authority to construct and equip the new Town Office Building" by appropriating \$106,500 for this purpose.

Two wooden frame structures (residences) had to be removed prior to the construction of both the Town Office Building and Cary Memorial Building. On the site of the present Town Office Building was the home of Harris E. Shaw. On the site of Cary Memorial Building was the William Plumer house, an early house which incorporated parts of a still earlier one - the 17th century home of Lexington's first minister, the Rev. Benjamin Estabrook. Both the Shaw and Plumer houses were torn down in 1927.

* Those serving on this committee were the five selectmen: Theodore A. Custance, Chairman; Albert H. Burnham, William H. Ballard, Francis Chamberlain, and James G. Robertson, and six citizens appointed by the Town Moderator: Albert B. Tenney, Edwin B. Worthen, Norman C. Hooper, Arthur N. Maddison, George W. Nary and Fred H. Moulton

In 1928 the town's attention was also focused on the acquisition of the Issac Harris Cary Memorial Building, which the town accepted from the trustees of the Cary Educational Fund at the January 31 Town Meeting. One of the most prominent families in Lexington since the mid 19th Century, the Carys, had donated almost half the funds needed to construct the 1871 Town Hall, and built the town's main library in 1905. In a letter written "To the Inhabitants of Lexington" on March 30, 1923, the trustees of the Cary Educational Fund announced that they had been directed to erect a Building for "the safe storing and exhibition of revolutionary relics and treasures of Lexington, and to contain a hall to be adapted to lectures and public meeting (sic)". The trustees noted that even though a new municipal office building might be built adjacent to the Memorial Building on land donated by the Carys, the funding of a building with administrative offices "is not authorized by the terms of their wills." (The trustees did in fact fund the entire grading and landscaping for the new Town Office Building).

When the buildings were completed there was no dedication of the new Town Office Building in part because the dedication of the office building in 1871 was apparently a commemoration of the town meeting place. The local newspaper complained about the lack of a second commemoration, but it was made in reference to the 1871 Town Hall:

No mention was made in any way about this being the last meeting in that (1871) hall or of any memorial service to be held in honor of the many battles fought upon the famous floor. Very few citizens in fact considered it worth while to take an evening to attend this last meeting. (Lexington Times - Minute-Man. Lexington, Mass. (July 6, 1928); p. 8; "Special Town Meeting and closing of Old Town Hall")

This newspaper felt strongly enough about the significance of the Old Town Hall to write a poem in honor of the 1871 building in the column where editorials normally appeared. This poem can be found in the Supplemental Material Section. In 1928, considerable attention was given to the Cary Memorial Building which was dedicated in October 18, 1928.

2. Architect

Kilham, Hopkins, Greeley and Brown, an architectural firm that was located at 9 Park Street in Boston, designed the original section of the Town Office Building. This section was completed in 1928. The only newspaper article tying these architects to the structure is by way of reference to the Cary Memorial Building, which this firm also designed (see reprints on the following two pages). However, on the same page as the newspaper reprint is a xerox from the 1927 Annual Reports, which confirms the work of Kilham, Hopkins, Greeley and Brown for both the Town Office Building and the Cary Memorial Building. Also reprinted here is the site plan of the Memorial Building on the land donated by the Cary family for this structure and the Town Office Building. Still another source tying these architects to the Town Office Building is the original blueprints from 1927. (see bibliography)

3. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers

James S. Greenwood was the general contractor for the Town Office Building in 1927-1928. He purchased waterstruck brick for this project from a company in Epping, New Hampshire.

4. - 5. Original Plans and Construction/Alterations and Additions

The following page contains an artist's depiction of the 1928 Town Office Building. Great care was taken during the 1970-1971 construction

to preserve and duplicate the appearance of the original section of the structure. As mentioned above, both the 1928 and 1971 sections have red brick and white trimmings on the exterior. Both wings of the building have a slate roof.

On June 30, 1970, 42 years to the day since the Town Office Building was first occupied, the general contractor, A. Bonfatti Co., Inc. of Norwood, began the interior alteration and the construction of the addition to the building. They remodeled and built the structure according to the specifications of Perry, Dean and Stewart (now Perry, Dean, Stahl and Rogers), an architectural firm in Boston. On October 15, 1971 the renovated and enlarged Town Office Building was open to business and was dedicated on January 9, 1972. (Newspaper clippings on the dedication appear in the Supplemental Materials Section)

The modern Town Office Building has 22,893 square feet, which is twice the space it had from 1928 to 1970. The more significant areas of growth were in the offices of the town administrators, which were expanded from 900 to 2,100 square feet partly because of the creation of the town manager position in 1969; the department of the comptroller, which was tripled in size to 1,500 square feet; and in the addition of 1,000 square feet of conference and committee rooms which did not exist in this structure before 1970.

Other changes to the building included the installation of air conditioning, a new elevator, a modern heating system and a new automatic internal dialing telephone system. The electric service capacity was doubled and the roof of the building was repaired.

B. Historical Context

When the Town Office Building opened for business in June of 1928, the Police Department occupied the entire ground floor. In 1956 the current police station was built on the east side of the Cary Memorial Building ('Lot W' from the Cary donation of the 1920's). Visitors to the Town Office Building today can still see the metal rings (on the western side of the building) that contained the bars for the jail's windows.

When the Police Department moved to its new site in 1956, it took the Assessors and Building Department with them. These departments remained on the second floor of the police station until 1971, when the Town Office Building was large enough to re-accommodate them.

The idea to create more space for the town offices took hold in the mid 1960's. The population of Lexington had jumped from 22,256 in 1955 to 31,388 in 1965 and the Town Meeting saw the need to provide services for a town that could conceivably grow to 45,000 residents. Even though Lexington's population peaked in 1971 and is only 30,000 today, it was evident in the 1960's that many departments needed more space to operate even if the population did not expand. Furthermore, the heating system, plumbing, wiring and other basic services needed updating.

Following a two-week "pedestrian traffic survey" of the Town Office Building and the second floor of the police station in 1965, the Public Works Garage Committee recommended in February of 1966 that a complete study be made of town office space. This resulted in the appointment of a new Town Office Building Committee on March 21, 1966, whose job was to make preliminary plans and specifications for additions and/or alterations

to the Town Office Building.* In the autumn of that year, this committee met with all departments, boards, commissions and committees to determine the personnel and equipment requirements for a town of 45,000 people. (The departments' space requirements for a projected population of this number was determined in July of 1968.) In November of 1966 the committee began to interview architects and in 1967 retained Perry, Dean and Stewart based on their experience with the Williamsburg, Virginia reconstruction, to design the alterations and addition to the Town Office Building. Among the options considered was the building of a new police station utilizing the 1956 constructed Police Station Building for a second Town Office Building.

The following two pages display the plan that the Town Office Building Committee recommended in their report of June 3, 1969 providing for an addition to the current structure. (The actual cost of the work on the Town Office Building, combined with the cost of adding a garage to the rear of the police station, was over \$1,000,000.) Details of how the committee reached its conclusion can be found in their report, a copy of which is kept in the Town Comptroller's Office.

Construction began on June 30, 1970, the building was occupied on October 15, 1971, and the dedication was on January 9, 1972. The newspaper articles in the Supplemental Materials Section describe the highlights of this ceremony. One can compare the civic pride reflected in these newspaper clippings with the controversy over the new Town Hall

* Those people who served on this committee were Selectman Allan F. Kenney (Chairman from 1969-1971), Selectman Robert Cataldo (Chairman from 1966-1969), Walter C. O'Connell (Town Manager from 1970-1976), Otis S. Brown, Jr., John H. Blaisdell, Emanuel Coscia, Jr., Albert Gray, Jr., John J. McSweeney, Mark Moore, Jr., and Richard M. Perry

a century earlier. Worthen wrote that, in 1871,

Some residents of the East Village were so angered because this new Town Hall was not located nearer the East Village (sic), a group of them united in securing an injunction to stop the construction of the building. It cost the town \$188 to dissolve the injunction. It is well known that certain old residents of the East Village never entered the new Town Hall.

PART TWO: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior

The following two pages are reprints from the cover of the Town Office Building Committee's June, 1969 report. The first page (with the label "Town of") is an illustration of the exterior of the original Town Office Building, looking west, as it existed from 1928 to 1970. The next page shows the present exterior of the building (the full cover of the committee's report).

As these illustrations indicate, the committee and the architects chose to construct an addition that was faithful to the original design. The use of bricks, trimming and the slate roof has already been discussed. The building still has three stories (a ground floor, first floor and second floor); the windows of the ground floor of the original half of the building are visible only from the western side of the building.

The committee's site plan reprinted above reveals that the building is of a rectangular form. The south side of the building (facing Massachusetts Avenue) has always been 58 feet long. The north side was 50 feet long until 1970-1971; now it is 58 feet long. The west side and the east side of the building (facing the Memorial Building), were each 78 feet long until 1970-1971, when they were doubled to 156 feet.

The exterior walls are concrete block and brick. A. Bonfatti Co., Inc. had been instructed to use bricks that after a period of aging would match the color of the 1928 bricks. The Epping, New Hampshire company that furnished Lexington with waterstruck bricks in 1928 had since sold its remaining supply of bricks to Harvard College and gone out of business. A. Bonfatti subcontracted the brick work to the

Spaulding Co., Inc. of Somerville, Massachusetts, which began the search for a vendor of waterstruck bricks. Spaulding's search took it to the town of Gonic in eastern New Hampshire. The Kane Gonic Brick Corporation there sold Spaulding 47,000 selected waterstruck bricks for the Town Office Building and 6,500 such bricks to build the garage for the police station.

The ground floor framing plan for the 1970-1971 addition indicates that the ground floor elevation is 208½ feet, with increments of 10-11 feet for each story. Each floor is supported by a concrete column and slab construction.

B. Description of Interior

The older half of the Town Office Building has wood joist floors on steel beams, and masonry walls. The floors in the 1970-1971 half are supported by either steel or wood or a combination thereof. The old wing had a plaster ceiling which in 1970-1971 was changed to a suspended acoustic tile ceiling, the style chosen for the new wing. The corridors and hallways in both wings have tile floors, and all offices have bluish-green wall to wall carpeting. The walls are of a soft beige color.

Because the new wings's interior was constructed from fire resistant materials, there are no water sprinklers in that half of the building. The original section has these sprinklers suspended from the ceiling. Another mechanical change that came in 1970-1971 was the piping. New underground conduits replaced the existing underground piping, and runs from the new wing of the office building to the boiler plant in the Cary Memorial Building.

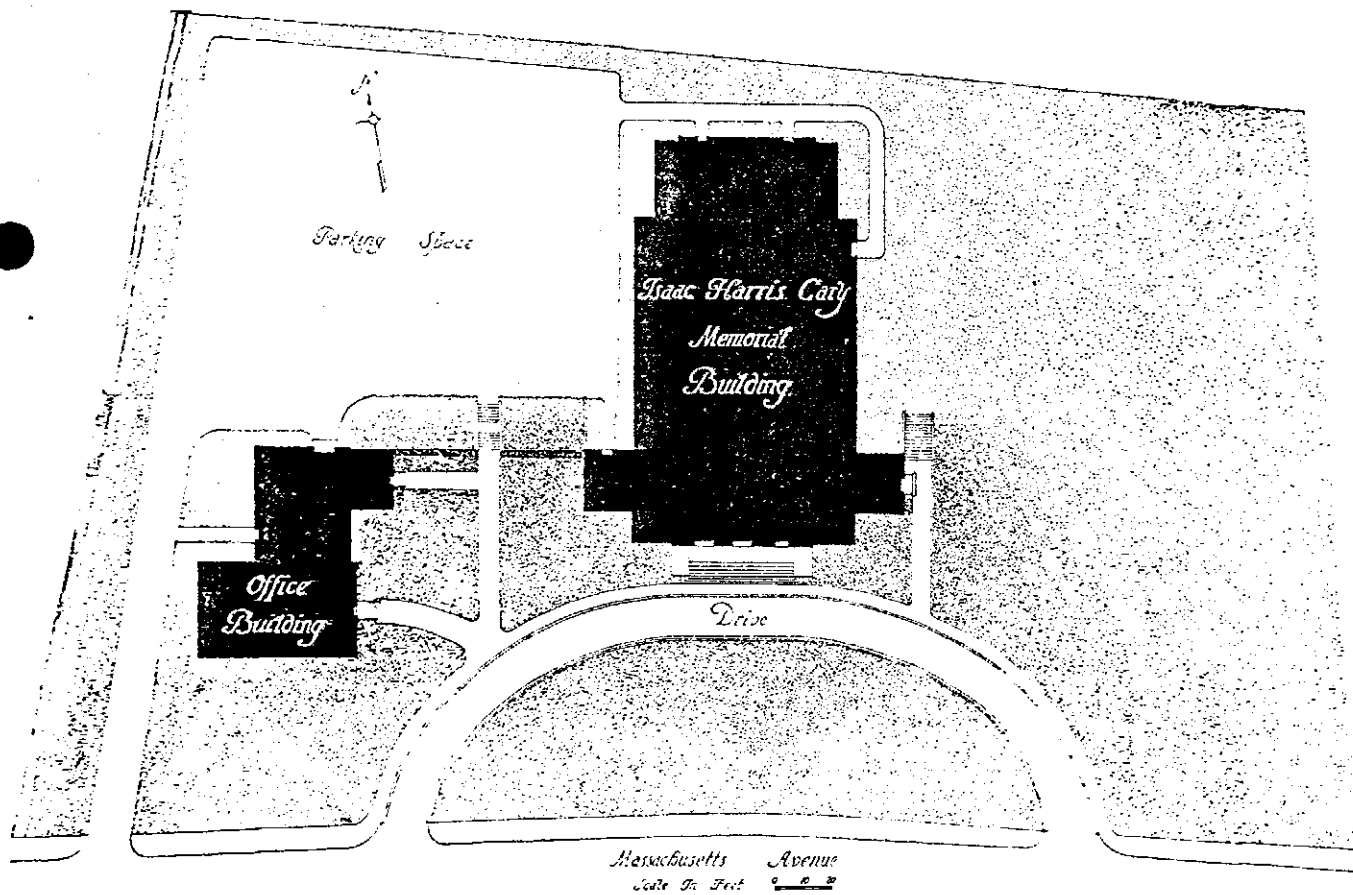
Today, the second floor of Lexington's Town Office Building contains the following departments and offices: the Board of Selectmen, and their meeting room, the Town Manager's Office and Public Works and Engineering Offices. The first floor is the location for the Town Clerk, Comptroller, Tax Collector, Treasurer, Water Billing Department and Veterans' Agent. The ground floor has the Board of Appeals, the Board of Assessors, the Building Inspector, the Recreation and Conservation Office, the Board of Health, the Planning Board and another meeting room. The basement in the old wing is unimproved and is at a different level than the basement in the addition. The new wing's basement has capacity for a civil defense room and mechanical room, and is currently used for storage.

The architectural drawings in Part Three accurately portray the floor plans of the structure, except for some changes not foreseeable at the time. On the second floor, the office marked "Town Manager" is the Selectmen's Office; the area marked "Selectmen's Clerical" (along with the adjacent unlabeled area against the south wall) is where the Town Manager's staff are assigned.

C. Site

The front of the Town Office Building (on Massachusetts Avenue) faces almost due south. To the East of the structure (on the right of the building looking from the street) lies the Isaac Harris Cary Memorial Building and the Police Station. To the West (left) of the office building is the local post office (its opening was marked by a dedication and banquet in the Memorial Building in 1938), and the Con Edison Building, site of the first house in Lexington (1642).

A comparison of the 1927 artist's rendition of the buildings and the modern Town Office Building Committee's site plan shows that further landscaping took place in 1970-1971. As stated above, the Cary family donated the funds for the original landscaping of the site of the two municipal buildings constructed in 1927-1928, and today the Public Works Department is maintaining the Cary's standard over a wider area of this land.



Artist's renditions of layout of new municipal buildings, and of view of Town Office Building, looking north from Massachusetts Avenue. (Annual Reports (1927), between pages 38 and 39.)

PART THREE: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings

The Town of Lexington's Engineering Department has provided four copies of architectural drawings, one for each floor of the Town Office Building plus the basement. As these drawings indicate, they were made on February 9, 1970.

B. Early Views

See the supplemental material section for one early view not already shown.

C. Bibliography

Primary Sources

Annual Reports of the Town Officers of Lexington, Massachusetts, Year: 1927 (1928), located in the Town Manager's Office, Town Office Building, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Charles A. Cadario, subcontractor for 1928-1929 masonry work.

Darrell Cain, Engineer Assistant; Town of Lexington Engineering Department.

Isaac Harris Cary Educational Fund's letter "To the Inhabitants of Lexington," March 30, 1923 (copy), located in special collections at Cary Memorial Library, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Isaac Harris Cary Educational Fund's pamphlet of specifications of Isaac Harris Cary Memorial Building, December, 1926, located in special collection at Cary Memorial Library, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Isaac Harris Cary Memorial Building, dedication pamphlet, October 18, 1928, located in special collection at Cary Memorial Library, Lexington Massachusetts.

Susanna E. Cary's last will and testament, October 26, 1911 (copy), located in the Town Manager's Office, Town Office Building, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Kilham, Hopkins, Greeley, and Brown, 1927 blueprints of Town Office Building, located in Town Office Building, Engineering Department's Map Room, with identification tag "V-1052."

Lexington Post Office, dedication pamphlet, November 28, 1938, located in special collection at Cary Memorial Library, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Perry, Dean, and Stewart, 1970 blueprints of Town Office Building, located in Town Office Building, Engineering Department's Map Room, with identification tag "V-1522."

Richard Perry, Comptroller, assorted notes on 1970-1971 renovations.

Stone model of pulpit engraved with information on Meetinghouses, located at Lexington Battle Green, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Town Clerk's Office, population statistics of the Town of Lexington, 1795-1975, (located at Town Office Building).

Town Office Building Committee's report, June 3, 1969, located in Comptroller's Office, Town Office Building.

S. Lawrence Whipple, Town Historian and member of Lexington Historical Society.

Secondary Sources

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for sale at the Visitor's Center at the Lexington Battle Green.

"The Last Town Meeting", Lexington Times-Minute-Man, July 6, 1928, page 2.

Mahoney, Joan, "Lexington Unveils Bit of its Past", The Boston Globe, January 10, 1972, page 1.

Mongiello, E.A. "Remodeled Lexington Town Offices, Building and Police Facilities", The Massachusetts Selectman, July, 1972.

"Selectmen Acknowledge Presentations to Town", Lexington Minute-Man, January 13, 1972, page 1.

"Special Town Meeting and Closing of Old Town Hall", Lexington Times-Minute-Man, July 6, 1928, page 8.

Worthen, Edwin B., A Calendar History of Lexington, Massachusetts 1620-1946 (1946), published by the Lexington Savings Bank, located in the Lexington Room at the Cary Memorial Library, Lexington, Massachusetts.

D. Likely Sources Not Investigated

The archives of the Lexington Historical Society has primary source material pertaining to this subject, including photographic material.

In 1913 Charles Hudson published his History of Lexington in two volumes, which is very informative about this town's early history. There are good primary sources, including Annual Reports, in the Lexington Room of the Cary Memorial Library.

E. Supplemental Material

The supplemental materials can be found on the following pages. These pages contain, in order, a photo of the 1871 Town Hall from Beverly Allison Kelley's book, Lexington - A Century of Photographs; the poem written in

honor of the 1871 structure by the Lexington Times Minute-Man; three newspaper clippings concerning the 1972 dedication ceremony, and a quotation about the town meeting form of government.

The supplemental material section and this report can perhaps best be concluded by referring to a quote used by Edwin B. Worthen in the preface to his Calendar History. On October 14, 1930, Chief Justice Rugg of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court said that

By experience there was wrought out the matchless mechanism of the town meeting (sic). It served the double purpose of government in local affairs and instruction of the citizens in public administration. It is an institution peculiar to New England. It was a pure democracy admirably adopted for successful operation in small communities. The town meeting system of local government has received lavish encomiums from every foreigner who has studied our institutions. Jefferson acknowledged its superiority. The principals of civil liberty were forged and diffused throughout the Colony by means of its frequent and animated deliberations.

Obviously the deliberations in Lexington today are not as "animated" as they were in 1775 (or in 1871 or at the turn of the century). Yet the spirit of the town meeting forum, where the voices of so many citizens can be heard, is still alive and well in Lexington's Cary Memorial Building.

Next door, the Town Office Building has a dedication stone stating that the office building is "Dedicated to the many public officials, town employees, and citizens who have so well served the people of Lexington." Yet in another sense, Lexington's Town Office Building is also dedicated to the success of the unique town meeting forum. For although Lexington's government has evolved over the years into the present selectmen-town

manager mode of operation, the town meeting has always existed in Lexington. The town meeting debates here have traditionally revealed the need and desire for civic facilities, such as modern office buildings, to better serve the public. The town meeting forum, therefore, helps explain why Lexington's Town Office Building is especially fit for the needs of this community.

David Ostrow
Management Intern
Town of Lexington
August 16, 1981